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ABSTRACT

The Real Game (TRG) Series is a set of six innovative career programs designed to bring interactive, experiential learning to the classroom. Each program is tailored to a specific range of age and grade levels. There are games available for three-year-olds up to adults. The basic aim of the series is to introduce realities of the adult world of work in a meaningful way and to help participants master the career development competencies outlined in the "Blueprint for Life/Work Designs" (Canada) and "National Career Development Guidelines" (USA). All the exercises and activities have been keyed to the competencies outlined in the Blueprint in the three areas of (1) personal management -- self-knowledge, (2) learning and work exploration -- educational and occupational exploration; and (3) career building -- career planning. Each game in the series incorporates increasingly challenging ideas and vocabulary and provides participants with different occupational roles. The games focus on teamwork and community interactions, involving parents throughout the process. This paper discusses the creation of, implementation of, and impact of The Real Game Series. (Author/MKA)

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The Real Game Series

Bringing Real Life to Career Development

Phil Jarvis and Joan Richardt

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The Real Game (TRG) Series is a set of six world-class innovative career programs designed to bring interactive, experiential learning to the classroom. The Series and the partnership framework that was used to create and implement these programs have made an exciting contribution to career development in Canada and the United States, and internationally.

How The Real Game Series Was Born

"What if we could give young people a practice run at being an adult while they're still in school - something that feels like the real world they'll soon be part of?"

That's what Bill Barry, from Newfoundland, Canada, asked when his 12 year-old daughter, Mara, complained that some of things she was learning about in school just didn't seem really useful or relevant to her in terms of her personal career dreams.

Bill set out to develop an engaging tool that would make learning about careers and work fun and interesting. The result was The Real Game designed for 12- to 14-year olds that was piloted in St. John's, Newfoundland, in 1994. It caused such interest that the program was presented to career specialists from across Canada later that year at a Canada Career Information Partnership (CCIP) meeting. From these humble beginnings, in the space of six years, the Real Game has evolved into a series of six internationally-recognized career development programs serving youth and adults.

The Partnership: Funding for the initial development of The Real Game Series came from the Real Game Inc. (RGI), National Life/Work Centre (NLWC) and Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). NLWC coordinates the project through an International Advisory Group that includes as member partners RGI, HRDC, CCIP with its provincial networks across Canada, the U.S. National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC), and other international partners as they come on board.

This partnership has succeeded in delivering the TRG Series programs to over 30,000 classrooms in North America, and numbers of programs shipped continue to increase. This has attracted the attention of career specialists, professional associations and governments in other countries, and now the international TRG Series partnership includes the United Kingdom, France, Australia, and New Zealand.

How the Real Game Works

This game is really fun. I learned how to co-operate and work with other people (5th Grade Student). . . . *I thought my parents didn't like me because they kept saying no to the Reeboks. Now I'm playing The Real Game, I can't understand how they have been able to say yes so often* (7th Grade Student)…. *I found out that a person's career is not decided completely on their skills. Their attitude is really important. And most people, me included, have hidden talents that will be useful for a future job* (9th Grade Student). . . . *I couldn't have felt worse about myself and my life. Then, in a few hours I was having fun, and feeling maybe I could have a real future. It was a turning point for me* (Former Welfare Recipient).

The Framework: The Real Game Series consists of six separate programs, each of which is tailored to a specific range of age and grade levels. The basic aim of the Series is to introduce realities of the adult world of work in a meaningful way and to help participants master the career

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development competencies outlined in the *Blueprint for Life/Work Designs* (Canada) and the *National Career Development Guidelines* (USA).

These broad career development competencies provide the framework within which the Real Game Series has been created. All the exercises and activities of the TRG Series have been keyed to the competencies outlined in the Blueprint in the three areas of 1) Personal Management - Self-Knowledge, 2) Learning and Work Exploration - Educational and Occupational Exploration, and 3) Career Building - Career Planning. (See Chapter XX for more detailed information about the Blueprint and its application in career development programs.)

Programs and Target Groups: The following table lists each game, the age and grade level it covers, and the pilot and launch dates for Canada and the U.S.

Game	Grade Year	Age Range	Pilot	Launch
The Play Real Game	3 to 4	8 to 10	Fall 1999	Fall 2000
The Make It Real Game	5 to 6	10 to 12	Fall 1998	Spring 1999
The Real Game	7 and 8	12 to 14	Spring 1995	Winter 1996
The Be Real Game	9 and 10	14 to 16	Spring 1998	Winter 1999
The Get Real Game	11 and 12	16 to 18	Spring 1999	Fall 2000
Real Times, Real Life	Post-Secondary	Adults'	Spring 1996	Winter 1997

The programs are packaged in three-ring binders that include all teacher and student materials (including overhead transparencies, posters, and reproducible masters) needed to implement the programs for as many participants as desired, over several years. Each game takes anywhere from 14 to 30 hours to play, although the duration is flexible, depending on the setting.

The Real Game Series is used in K-12 schools, colleges, universities, one-stop career resource and employment service sites, vocational rehabilitation and workers' compensation settings, outplacement and corporate human resource offices, correctional institutions, military settings, community volunteer agencies across Canada and the United States and internationally.

Playing the Real Game: Every program provides a personal career-building context that participants and facilitators at all levels find enjoyable and stimulating. Within the context of the Blueprint framework, each game in the series incorporates increasingly challenging ideas and vocabulary and provides participants with different occupational roles. The games focus on teamwork and community interactions, involving parents throughout the process. The programs employ challenging, engaging, and entertaining learning techniques that have been proven to be effective in thousands of classrooms.

Through playing the games in the series, participants will:

- learn career development concepts and vocabulary
- take on and play life/work roles
- create and act within a simulated community and society
- learn to locate and use career and labour market information
- explore occupations and lifestyles
- examine the relationship between school courses and future goals
- survey the changing world of work
- "experience" job loss and work search
- learn how to prepare for life and work transitions
- practise essential life/work skills

Through playing the games, students (and teachers) get dramatic new insights into the relevance of the curriculum to future life and work opportunities. They see relevance and connections not obvious to them before. They begin clearly to see why the Math, Science and English lessons they are involved in right now are important to their lives, not just to get over the next educational hurdle.

In addition, other career development and learning resources enjoy increased impact when used with The Real Game Series. For example, when students have just received "pink slips" and lost their jobs in the game, they are more likely to take the issues of job search, resume preparation and research of alternatives to heart. Computer and Internet-based career information systems, tests, print career information resources, personal networking and community links and resources all enjoy increased demand from and utility with the TRG Series participants.

How the Real Game Works for Teachers: The Real Game Series provides a vehicle to infuse career development into any curriculum in a way that makes sense to students, teachers, administrators and parents, without adding to educators' workloads. In fact, they enjoy this new approach, which quickly delivers impressive gains in learning and performance outcomes.

In the over 30,000 North American classrooms now using The Real Game Series, a team-teaching approach is most common. English, Math, Science, Home Economics, Shop, Geography, Social Studies, Physical Education, Business and other subject teachers and of course career counsellors, librarians, administrators, parent volunteers, peer facilitators (students from older grades) can all facilitate key activities in the program.

Support: Although complete and easy-to-follow lesson plans are provided for teachers and facilitators, training is highly recommended. Both students and teachers benefit more from the program if the teacher participates in a one-day training session. Regional training sessions are organized regularly by the partner countries; information about training is available on the Real Game website (see below). In addition, in Canada and the U.S., teachers can obtain help with implementing the TRG Series by calling toll-free to Real Game experts who are available to give direction and advice.

The Real Game Website: The Real Game Website at http://realgame.com offers comprehensive information about each program in the series, training workshops, the free online Community Newsletter, and up-to-the minute news on Real Game developments. On the website, individuals can also play the "Spin Game" and other actual activities from each program in the series. This entertaining introduction to key aspects of the series helps visitors to the website understand why teachers and students enjoy these programs so much.

Implementation of the Real Game Series

"Young people have a very different world they are now moving into, and we have got to start the process of preparing them for that world much earlier if they are going to learn the skills to be effective in that world. It's not something that can be left until after school; it's not something that can be left to the last couple of years. This game provides a mechanism to make that happen." - Tony Watts, National Institute of Careers Education & Counselling, United Kingdom

The Partnership Formula: An innovative approach to developing effective partnerships has been the "winning formula" for implementing The Real Game Series. This partnering strategy requires involvement from respected organizations and individuals with solid reputations in career development and effective networks across the countries that wish to implement the program.

A "Partnership Framework" which outlines the roles and responsibilities of all partners involved in the program has guided collaboration activities for developing and implementing the TRG Series. This Framework remains the basis for any new implementation of programs and has been instrumental in bringing international partners on board. The Framework itself involves fifteen distinct phases all partners adhere to. The phases include the general areas of program conception and definition, prototype development, piloting, evaluation/revisions, and implementation. A complete copy of The Partnership Framework for The Real Game Series can be found on the Web at http://www.realgame.com (Click on the Canadian flag on the splash page).

A Comprehensive Piloting Process: A unique approach to program piloting has also been a key factor to the success of the TRG Series. Once a prototype program is developed and ready for piloting, hundreds of students, teachers and parents are "deputized" as co-developers and contribute to the development, evaluation and revision processes. Pilot sites must apply to participate in the program and show commitment to be involved.

In Canada and the U.S., for each program in the TRG Series, at least 100 pilot sites (50 in each country) from coast-to-coast have participated, involving over 5,000 individuals. The pilot program participants' role is to play the game, then tell the developers how it can be improved. The feedback from all pilot sites is then reviewed and incorporated into the final product which is invariably much richer than the pilot prototype. Given this kind of in-depth pilot testing, users of the TRG Series can be confident that the programs meet the real needs of their students and clients.

International Implementation: The TRG Series international partnership network now includes the national and local departments of education, employment or training in the UK, France, Australia and New Zealand.

When a country expresses interest in TRG Series, the National Life/Work Centre works with national governments at the outset rather than with individual states/provinces, private companies or professional associations. Once a partnership agreement is in place, the co-development partners authorize appropriate national agencies to adapt one or more programs in the TRG Series to their own cultural and economic realities. Program conception, development, piloting and launching usually involve at least a 10- to 12-month process before a final edition of a Real Game program is distributed. The piloting process described above is standard for any international implementation. In addition, international partners have agreed that the series needs to be financially self-sustaining, on a not-for-profit basis, with cost-recovery pricing well below commercial equivalents.

The NLWC will not ship Canadian editions of these programs to anyone in countries that have not executed international partnership agreements with the series co-development partners. Practitioners from any country already involved in The Real Game Series should contact their national representative. The home page of the realgame.com website includes the flags for all the

partners; simply click on the flag of your home country to get more information. Also check out the information on "International Collaboration."

If readers from countries that are not development partners feel that these programs may have merit for their youth and adults, they should encourage career specialists within their national governments to explore the merits of joining the international TRG Series partnership.

International interest in the TRG Series continues to grow, with all countries freely sharing their experiences and innovations with these programs. No Canadian career initiative before this series has ever enjoyed this level of international success.

Impact of The Real Game Series

"The Guidelines/Blueprint and Real Game 'one-two punch' is redefining the architecture of career development throughout North America, and beyond . . . People don't need to be sold on the approach. They simply need to learn about these resources. There has never been anything in the career field that made more sense to more people."
- Phil Jarvis, National Life/Work Centre, Canada

Meeting international needs: Since the introduction of the first program in the series in January, 1996, programs in the TRG Series have been used with students in over 30,000 classrooms and community agencies in North America, and many more in Europe and the Pacific Rim. Because of their modular structure and flexibility, these programs can be used in virtually any setting where career development assistance is offered to youth or adults. The programs in this series have been proven to offer important skills to youth and adults in any country that places a priority on human and labour force development.

Building on a recognized competency framework and career building principles: Because these programs have been created in conformity with the Blueprint/Guidelines competency and performance indicator framework, they have immediate face-validity and measurability. Practitioners who use The Real Game Series can be confident that the programs help students to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need for effective career development. Moreover, the "High Five" Guiding Principles (1. Believe in yourself and follow your heart; 2. Change is constant; 3. Learning is lifelong; 4. Focus on the journey, not the destination; and 5. Access your allies, be an ally) are embedded in all programs in the series.

Bringing real life to learning: The success of the program also highlights the need for offering relevant, experiential career development learning opportunities to young people and adults. All the programs in the series use role-playing, future activities, simulations, and community resources that relate to life/work decisions and situations. Integrating these activities and experiences into an engaging "game" that is fun and meaningful to play is the key ingredient that has made the TRG Series so successful. Career practitioners everywhere can use these concepts to bring real life into their classrooms and learning environments.

The TRG Series Vision: A Career Development Culture

Healthy self-reliant citizens: It is the collective vision of the TRG Series partners that these programs will eventually be experienced by most students at multiple points during their K-12 educational journey, and that adults in career transitions will have ready access to adult editions. The TRG Series partners hope that these programs will be viewed as key Guidelines/Blueprint-compliant resources to support and enhance curriculum to produce healthy, self-reliant citizens - the ultimate goal of effective career development. The programs can also make a significant contribution to enhancing school-home-community partnerships, and along with other exemplary career development resources, contribute to the establishment and nurturing of a career development culture in communities across entire nations.

An international vision: We live and work in a global economy. To succeed in this world where change is constant and where workers will have to make dozens of transitions in their careers, individuals need new knowledge, skills and attitudes. The Real Game Series is dedicated to helping people develop the life/work skills needed in the global labour market, skills that are now as important as those obtained through academic study and training.

The Real Game Series offers the opportunity to develop an international vision to help young people and adults around the world to develop the skills they need to succeed in their chosen life/work.